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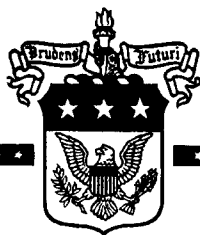
US OBJECTIVES IN VIETNAM: AN ANALYSIS OF CURRENT AND ULTIMATE GOALS

By

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SEP 27 1966



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An Analysis of Current and Ultimate Goals

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8 April 1966

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
SUMMARY	iii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION.	1
2. VIETNAM: ITS CHARACTERISTICS, PEOPLE AND HISTORY	5
Characteristics and people.	5
History	7
Summary	13
3. HOW THE UNITED STATES BECAME INVOLVED	15
World War II.	15
Post World War II	16
1954 Geneva Accords	22
US commitment to South Vietnam.	26
Summary	41
4. US OBJECTIVES IN VIETNAM.	46
The big picture	47
Immediate objectives.	50
Summary	60
5. CONCLUSIONS	62
BIBLIOGRAPHY.	66

SUMMARY

This paper examines US objectives in Vietnam with a view to determining whether they are realistic and attainable, and whether actions being taken to achieve them are leading to their successful and timely accomplishment. In order to set the stage for a meaningful analysis, it was necessary to gain some understanding of the country, its people and history. In addition, it was necessary to ascertain how the United States became involved and the nature, basis, and extent of the US commitment.

Vietnam has a rich and turbulent history dating back more than 2000 years. During this period the country has experienced foreign occupation three times--by the Chinese for 1000 years, by the French for nearly 100 years, and by the Japanese during World War II. Each period was marked by uprisings until the foreigners were finally expelled. But during periods of independence, the country was torn by internal strife and conflict associated with Vietnamese expansion to the south. Traditionally, there has been a rivalry between northerners and southerners with the country divided at about the 17th parallel for more than half of the last 300 years.

The US involvement began in 1950 with the provision of money and materiel to France for use in fighting the Indochina war. Although the US threatened to intervene militarily and considered doing so in 1954, President Eisenhower decided against it for both political and military reasons. Our involvement stems from the basic US policy to contain communism.

The present US commitment to South Vietnam has been attributed to a letter written by President Eisenhower to President Diem in October 1954. However, an examination of this letter and numerous speeches and statements subsequent thereto revealed that the original commitment has been enlarged considerably from that which was intended at the time. The change in the scope of the US commitment is examined in detail in Chapter 3.

President Johnson and other Administration officials have stated our objectives in Vietnam many times and in many different ways. These objectives cannot be found neatly packaged in any single document. Therefore, it was necessary to derive them from various speeches and statements. Our ultimate goal in Vietnam is the same goal that we seek for all free nations. Our immediate objectives are: (1) to prove the value of a US commitment, (2) to prove to the Communist-World that "wars of national liberation" cannot succeed, (3) to convince Hanoi, Moscow, and Peiping that we have drawn a line in Southeast Asia, (4) to persuade North Vietnam to withdraw its units from the south and stop supplying the Viet Cong, (5) to assist South Vietnamese forces in rooting out and

destroying Viet Cong main-force units, (6) to assist the South Vietnamese government in bringing about political, economic, and social changes that will win the people over to the government, (7) to obtain a political settlement that will guarantee the freedom and independence of South Vietnam as envisaged in the 1954 Geneva Accords.

The major conclusion of this paper is that our objectives are realistic and attainable, and that actions being taken to achieve them appear to be leading to their successful accomplishment. But, it will probably be a long and costly effort, unless we are willing to remove our self-imposed constraints and use our military power to make the price of continued aggression by North Vietnam much steeper than the price they are now paying. Only when the price to be paid exceeds the benefits to be gained will aggression cease.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Vietnam is a country which has known no peace for more than a quarter of a century. It has been torn by revolution or insurrection since the end of World War II and divided, since 1954, into a Communist controlled North and an anti-Communist controlled South, similar to North and South Korea and East and West Germany.

What began as a war to gain independence from French colonial rule has become a war to win the hearts and minds of the South Vietnamese people--an ideological war--with the backers of both sides¹ seeking to prove a point. That point is whether so-called "wars of national liberation" or "people's wars" are to be or not to be the wave of the future in Asia, Africa and Latin America--a means for spreading communism which can or cannot be contained by those who are free and willing to fight to defend their freedom.

More than a decade ago the United States side-stepped the Vietnam issue, despite its oft proclaimed policy to contain communism, for reasons which appear to have been motivated primarily by politics, but also because military leaders cautioned against becoming bogged down in a ground war on the mainland of Asia. Yet, at this writing--February 1966, the United States is deeply involved in the war in

¹The United States and some other Free World Countries support South Vietnam while the Soviet Union, Communist China, and other Communist nations aid North Vietnam.

Vietnam--a conflict on the mainland of Asia which has been escalated in the past year and may be further escalated in the months ahead. It may even lead to an unlimited, world-wide conflict, depending upon the price each side is willing to pay to achieve its goals. At this point in time "the pot is right", all concerned have "anted up" and are waiting for the turn of the next card. The stakes are high and it appears that neither side can win by bluffing. Thus, there is no end in sight.

Much has been said and written in the past year about why we are in Vietnam, what our objectives are, and the actions which have been taken, are being taken, or should be taken to accomplish our goals in Vietnam. We are there to honor a commitment to help the people and government of South Vietnam to maintain their freedom and independence, to prove to other Free-World nations that we stand by our commitments, and to make it unmistakably clear to the Communist world that we have drawn a line in Southeast Asia, beyond which communism will not be permitted to expand.²

Public opinion polls show that the majority of the American people support the President and the actions being taken to honor our commitment. But there appears to be a growing concern on the part of some members of Congress, the press, and the public as to the scope of our commitment and our exact aims in Vietnam. There is a question of whether our stated objectives are realistic and

²Lyndon B. Johnson, "Pattern for Peace in Southeast Asia," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. 52, 26 Apr. 1965, p. 607.

attainable, and whether the actions being taken to achieve them are proper. Questions also have been raised as to the legality of our actions; why we have not placed the issue before the United Nations as we did in the case of Korea; why our Free-World partners, particularly those who are members of both NATO and SEATO and look to us to honor our commitments to them, have not joined us in our efforts to defend South Vietnam; why other Asiatic non-Communist nations such as India and Japan, who have perhaps an even greater stake than we in halting the expansion of communism in Asia, have failed to support us--even with words; why some of our most trusted friends and allies continue to trade with the enemy--North Vietnam. Admittedly, we do not stand entirely alone in Vietnam. Australia, New Zealand, and the Republic of Korea are supporting us with troops and others are providing token support.³ However, none of the major Free-World powers--those whom we have helped the most--Britain, France, Germany, Japan and India have even offered to send troops to fight at our side. They do, however, expect American troops to come to their aid when the chips are down. Perhaps they do not share our concern or simply do not wish to become involved. In any event, it is obvious that they do not feel their national interests are seriously affected or threatened.

The purpose of this paper is to examine US objectives in Vietnam and the actions being taken to achieve them with a view to determining

³"When US Asks Allies For Help." U.S. News & World Report, Vol. 59, 27 Dec. 1965, p. 24.

whether those objectives are realistic and attainable, and whether the actions being taken to attain them appear to be leading to their successful and timely accomplishment. Alternatives and the enemy's objectives and strategy will be considered. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn.

In order to set the stage for any meaningful analysis, it will be necessary to touch briefly upon the history of Vietnam and to ascertain how the United States became involved; the nature, extent and basis for our present commitment; and how our Vietnam objectives relate to our national interests. With this approach in mind let us turn, first to the country we are committed to defend.

CHAPTER 2

VIETNAM: ITS CHARACTERISTICS, PEOPLE AND HISTORY

CHARACTERISTICS AND PEOPLE

Vietnam, as we know it today, stretches from north to south along the eastern coast of the Southeast Asian peninsula for more than 1000 miles. Its width varies from 25 to 300 miles and its total area covers about 127,000 square miles. A preponderance of the land is covered with trees or brush (about 80%), about half of which is high-stand tree cover or plain jungle; the remainder is covered by the open plains of the rice bearing deltas.

Shaped like an elongated S, Vietnam is bordered on the north by Communist China; on the east by the Gulf of Tonkin and the South China Sea, on the south by the Gulf of Thailand (Siam); and on the west by Cambodia and Laos which, along with Vietnam, formed what was formerly known as French Indochina. Historically, the country has been divided into three principal regions: (1) Tonkin which covers the North Vietnam area and the Red River Delta - one of the two "rice baskets" of Vietnam; (2) Cochinchina or the southern region of Vietnam, including the rich Mekong Delta; and, (3) Annam or Central Vietnam containing the mountainous region linking the two deltas.¹ "Like two rice baskets at opposite ends of their

¹Joseph Buttinger, The Smaller Dragon, pp. 21-22.

carrying pole" - that is the way the Vietnamese often describe their country, according to Bernard Fall.²

Vietnam has a population of more than 30 million people who live mainly in the two major delta areas and along the coastal plain of Central Vietnam.³ Bernard Fall points out that the bulk of the people (29 million) live on about 20 percent of the national territory, while the remaining 1.5 million literally roam over more than 100,000 square miles of plateau and mountain areas.⁴

Despite their diverse racial origins, the lingering influence of Chinese civilization after more than 1000 years of Chinese rule, and the impact of European culture stemming from nearly 100 years of French presence and control, the Vietnamese consider themselves an ethnically and culturally homogenous people. Moreover, they are proud of having their own language, family patterns, art, and educational system.⁵ There are, however, three significant ethnic minorities who comprise about 15 percent of the total population. The largest minority group is the mountain tribesman - some 2.6 million in the north (Thai, Muong and Meo) and about a million in the south (Montagnards). The other two large minority groups are concentrated south of the 17th parallel - about a million Chinese engaged in commercial activities, and about a half-million Cambodians who live mainly in and west of the Mekong Delta.⁶

²Bernard B. Fall, The Two Viet-Nams, p. 3.

³Wesley R. Fishel, "Vietnam: Is Victory Possible?", Headline Series, No. 163, Feb. 1964, p. 6.

⁴Fall, op. cit., p. 5.

⁵Fishel, op. cit., pp. 4-7; and Fall, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

⁶Fall, op. cit., pp. 5-6; and Buttinger, op. cit., pp. 24-29.

HISTORY

Vietnam has a rich and turbulent history dating back more than 2000 years. Probably the most comprehensive effort in compiling that history for the period up to 1900 is the work of Joseph Buttinger, The Smaller Dragon. However, for the purpose of this paper only those aspects will be highlighted which will serve to provide an insight into the endless struggle of the Vietnamese people for independence and the many years of internal strife and conflict connected with Vietnamese expansion to the South.

The forerunner of today's Vietnam was the kingdom of Nam-Viet, which was founded prior to 200 B.C. and was composed of parts of southern China and present-day North Vietnam.⁷ In 111 B.C. the Chinese invaded, conquered and annexed Nam-Viet, and for more than 1000 years it was governed as a Chinese province.⁸ During the period of Chinese rule there were frequent uprisings until the Vietnamese finally gained their independence in 939 A.D. Except for a period of about 20 years (1407-1427) when the Chinese renewed their occupation, the Vietnamese enjoyed more than 900 years of independence. This period was terminated when the French completed their conquest in 1883.⁹

⁷Roy Jumper and Majorie Weiner Normond, "Vietnam: The Historical Background," in Vietnam - History, Documents and Opinions on a Major Crisis, ed. by Marvin E. Gettleman, p. 10, and Fall, op. cit., pp. 9-11.

⁸Buttinger, op. cit., pp. 72-77, and Fall, op. cit., pp. 9-11.

⁹Buttinger, op. cit., pp. 153-158, Fall, op. cit., pp. 10-12, and Jumper and Normand, op. cit., pp. 12-20.

Although nominally united, the long period of independence (10th to 19th century) was one of almost continuous strife. There were numerous dynastic struggles, wars between rival mandarins and many bitter conflicts associated with the Vietnamese expansion to the south into the former Indian Empire of Champa (present-day Central Vietnam) and the territory in the Mekong Delta and southwest held by the Khmer Empire (modern-day Cambodia).¹⁰ Fall points out that much of what is today the Republic of Vietnam south of the 17th parallel has been "Vietnamese" for a shorter span of time than the Eastern seaboard of the United States has been "American".¹¹ Moreover, the wars among the mandarins produced two strong rival factions, the Mac's in the north (later replaced by the Trinh) and the Nguyen's in the south, who kept the country in a civil war for almost 100 years and divided at about the 17th parallel for another 150 years. Neither faction was ever able to conquer the other and the country remained divided until finally united under Emperor Gia-Long in 1802. This period of unity was brief and ended when the French gained control of the south in the 1860's.¹²

The French period of control began in 1861 with the occupation of Saigon but complete control was not achieved until the capture of Hanoi in 1883.¹³ Although French control and presence in Vietnam

¹⁰Buttinger, op. cit., pp. 34-40, 160-170; and Fall, op. cit., pp. 12-19.

¹¹Fall, op. cit., p. 16.

¹²Buttinger, op. cit., pp. 162-168, 175-176, 243-244; and Fall, op. cit., pp. 17-25.

¹³Fishel, op. cit., p. 7; and Buttinger, op. cit., p. 349.

lasted until 1954, the Vietnamese resisted them almost from the beginning. Thus, this period too, was marked by frequent nationalist uprisings until once again Vietnam had achieved its independence from foreign rule.¹⁴ However, the influence of nearly 100 years of French domination left its imprint on the traditional Vietnamese society and the moral and ethical values of Vietnamese culture.

The imposition of French colonial administration, with its Western principles, organizations, legal codes and techniques, on top of the traditional mandarin system of the Vietnamese resulted in economic, political, and social changes which drastically changed the customary way of life. The traditional autonomy of the Vietnamese village was stripped away, first, by placing the police and judicial powers in the hands of Frenchmen, and, then, by the widespread use of French civil servants at local administrative levels in positions usually held by indigenous personnel in other Southeast Asian colonies. In addition, the old patterns of land tenure and distribution were changed, and high taxes and usurious interest rates were imposed, causing people to lose their land or become deeply indebted. Finally, Western ideas of education were substituted for the traditional Confucianist ideas of morality and ethics which led to increased corruption by mandarins who cooperated with the French.¹⁵ All of these factors contributed to the

¹⁴Jumper and Normand, op. cit., pp. 25-29; and Buttinger, op. cit., pp. 379-385, 423-463.

¹⁵Jumper and Normand, op. cit., pp. 20-25; and Fishel, op. cit. p. 7.

Vietnamese hatred of the French and fired their determination to regain their independence.

For all practical purposes, French control of Vietnam came to an end when the Japanese occupied the country in 1940, although the Japanese permitted them to continue to administer the country until March 1945. At that time, the Japanese imprisoned the French authorities and granted independence to Vietnam under Emperor Bao Dai. However, this lasted only until August 1945 when Japan surrendered and Bao Dai abdicated, leaving a power vacuum. A few weeks later Ho Chi Minh and the Vietminh stepped in to fill the vacuum by proclaiming the independence of Vietnam and the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.¹⁶

Ho Chi Minh, a Communist since the 1920's, organized the Vietminh in 1941 by appealing to various non-Communist Vietnamese groups to join in a common struggle against both the Japanese and the French for independence and a social program based on the idea of a democratic republic. The League for the Independence of Vietnam (Vietminh) thus formed became the first anti-Japanese (and later anti-French) guerrilla force in Vietnam, although they did not become active until 1944 when Ho Chi Minh was released from prison by the Nationalist Chinese. During this period, and the early years after World War II, Ho played down the Communist influence, even to the extent of dissolving the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP),

¹⁶Fishel, op. cit., p. 8; and Fall, op. cit., pp. 54-59.

and stressed the nationalist nature of the Vietminh movement. Thus, initially the Vietminh had wide popular support as well as the support of American OSS teams operating in Vietnam.¹⁷

Despite their defeat in World War II at the hands of the Germans in France and the Japanese in Indochina, the French were determined to regain their control of Indochina. Shortly after V-J Day, with the assistance of the British who occupied the southern part of Vietnam, and the Chinese Nationalists who occupied the northern part, the French began to reassert their authority. As French troop strength built-up they entered into negotiations with the Vietminh and Chinese to end the Chinese occupation of the north. As a result, an agreement was reached in March 1946 leading to the withdrawal of the Chinese forces, and French recognition of North Vietnam as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. However, in May 1946, while Ho Chi Minh was in France negotiating a final settlement, the French High Commissioner of Indochina recognized the Republic of Cochin China as a free state on terms similar to those established for the north. Finally, when it was apparent to Ho Chi Minh that the French had no intention of establishing fully independent states within the French Union and, after several incidents, the most notable being the "Haiphong incident", Ho Chi Minh and the Vietminh launched an attack on 19 December 1946 on French garrisons throughout

¹⁷Dennis Warner. The Last Confucian, pp. 29-34; and Fall, op. cit., pp. 62-66.

Vietnam. This was the beginning of what is generally known as the Indochina War.¹⁸ (Fall refers to this war, which lasted until 1954, as the First Indochina War.)

From 1946 until 1949, the French made little progress in their effort to defeat the Vietminh. Moreover, they had suffered substantial casualties, but they still felt that the Vietminh could not win and that a military stalemate was the most likely prospect. However, events in China taking place at the same time were destined to alter the course of the war. Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Communists were soundly defeating Chiang Kai-Shek and the Chinese Nationalists and, by late 1949, the Chinese Communist armies were on the borders of Indochina.¹⁹ Thus, the Vietminh had been provided "with a 'sanctuary' where its troops could be trained and its supplies stored and replenished", and "the war had, for all practical purposes, become hopeless for the French."²⁰ At this point, the West began to reevaluate the situation. The British, hoping to save some of their financial investments in Shanghai while bolstering the French position in Indochina, decided to recognize Bao Dai who had agreed to return as the head of an independent state. They also recognized Mao Tse-tung. The United States also recognized Bao Dai and began an aid program to France to help defeat the Vietminh. This program grew from an initial commitment of \$23 million in

¹⁸Fall, op. cit., pp. 71-77.

¹⁹Warner, op. cit., pp. 36-39.

²⁰Fall, op. cit., p. 108 (See also Fall, "Street Without Joy," p. 17).

1950-51 to over a billion dollars three years later.²¹ This then was the beginning of the US involvement in Vietnam, which has continued to the present.

The Bao Dai alternative to the Vietminh failed to win the hearts and minds of the people; consequently the American aid provided to France for conduct of the war simply was not enough to prevent the eventual collapse of the French and their humiliating defeat at Dien Bien Phu. Thus, the war and French rule in Vietnam finally came to an end on the basis of a cease-fire agreement signed at Geneva on July 20, 1954. In addition, the agreement provided for the temporary division of Vietnam at about the 17th parallel, pending free elections to be held in July 1956 throughout Vietnam to settle questions as to how north and the south would be reunited, who would be it's leaders, and what form it's political organization would take.²² Once again, the north-south division which had existed for 150 years, except for a brief period before the French arrived, had been renewed and the two Vietnams began to build their own separate institutions.²³

SUMMARY

Vietnam is a country which has experienced three periods of foreign occupation - by the Chinese for 1000 years, by the French for nearly 100 years and by the Japanese during World War II. During

²¹Warner, op. cit., p. 39.

²²Fishel, op. cit., pp. 9-11.

²³Fall, op. cit., pp. 77-78, 129, 233.

each of these periods the Vietnamese were united in their desire to expel the foreigners and regain their independence. In each instance, they eventually succeeded, relying primarily on guerrilla warfare tactics of fighting in the country-side until they achieved sufficient strength to attack the cities and strongholds of their foreign rulers. During periods of independence, the country was torn by internal strife and by conflicts with neighbors to the south as the Vietnamese proceeded to expand their territory to the geographical limits of the present-day Vietnam. Traditionally, a rivalry has existed between the "northerners" and the "southerners" and division of the country at about the 17th parallel has been the "norm" for more than half of the past 300 years. Yet, the leaders of both north and south have always sought to reunite their country under the control of their respective regimes. This is the situation today, with the United States committed to help the government and the people in the south to resist the attempt to conquer them undertaken by those in the north. How, then, did the United States become involved?

CHAPTER 3

HOW THE UNITED STATES BECAME INVOLVED

WORLD WAR II

Prior to the US involvement in World War II, we had no particular interest in Indochina or Southeast Asia for that matter. These were areas of primary interest to others--the British, the French, and the Dutch. Isolationism and noninvolvement were our basic foreign policies. Consequently, in June 1940, when the Japanese were threatening to attack Indochina we declined to supply aircraft and anti-aircraft artillery requested by the French. According to Robert Scheer, when the French asked if there was an alternative to surrender, Under-Secretary of State Sumner Welles replied:

" . . . it is what I would do in your place."¹ Bernard Fall, in noting that the United States still clung to its policy of non-involvement in the summer of 1940, states that Welles told the French Ambassador that the United States could not get involved with Japan in view of the general situation and would not oppose a Japanese attack on Indochina.² Fall explains, however, that this policy was apparently based on a State Department estimate that the Japanese were so tied up on the mainland of China that they could not undertake additional military commitments, and, in all probability, they were bluffing.³

¹Robert Scheer, How the United States Got Involved in Vietnam, pp. 3-4.

²Bernard Fall, The Two Viet-Nams, p. 41.

³Ibid.

After the United States entered World War II, President Roosevelt expressed some strong opinions regarding French colonial rule and the future of Indochina. He felt that the French had so misruled, exploited and oppressed the Indochinese people that they should not be allowed to go back into Indochina after the war and reestablish their empire. As one solution, Roosevelt is said to have offered Indochina to Chiang Kai-Shek, but Chiang reportedly declined the offer because the people, especially the Vietnamese, had always been hostile to the Chinese and would never assimilate into the Chinese people. Later at the Teheran and Yalta Conferences, Roosevelt proposed that Indochina be placed under a trusteeship without the participation of France in its administration. Churchill apparently opposed that idea and, with Roosevelt's death, the idea also faded away.⁴

POST WORLD WAR II

After the passing of Roosevelt, and during the early years of the Truman administration, there was little interest in the fate of Indochina.⁵ This is understandable with the many pressing problems confronting us at that time such as the reconstruction of Europe, the Communist insurgency in Greece, the Berlin Blockade, and the civil war in China. However, when the Chinese Communist forces

⁴Victor Bator, Vietnam - A Diplomatic Tragedy, pp. 205-206; Scheer, op. cit., p. 4 and Fall, op. cit., pp. 50-53.

⁵Wesley R. Fishel, "Background of the US Role in Vietnam" in Vietnam: A Report on a Wingspread Briefing, p. 5.

rolled to the borders of Indochina late in 1949, we began to see more clearly the Communist threat to Southeast Asia. With French prodding, a decision was made to aid France and the people of Indochina in combating communism, which had manifested itself in the Communist-led, Vietminh nationalist movement.⁶ As a result, we gave some \$2.6 billion in aid to France between 1950 and 1954, "for use in winning the war in Indochina and in developing autonomy and, eventually, independence for Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos."⁷ Thus, the US involvement in Vietnam began on December 23, 1950 when it signed a Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement with France, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos for indirect US military aid to the Indochinese countries.⁸

Despite the massive US material and financial aid provided to France for the war in Vietnam (80 percent of the cost of war), and the fact that French forces outnumbered the Vietminh by a factor of 5 to 3 and an estimated 10 to 1 in armaments, France lost the war. Why? According to Scheer, "the right wing in America has suggested that it was lost because the Administration was not fully committed to a 'win' policy" and, "according to this view, 'winning' required a show of strength to the Kremlin with the full commitment of American power in men and weapons".⁹

⁶Ibid., and Bator, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

⁷Ibid.

⁸"The Story of US Involvement: 1950-1964", Congressional Digest, Vol. 44, Apr. 1965, p. 101.

⁹Scheer, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

It is pertinent to point out that today, even though the US, in the past year, has committed a substantial number of both men and weapons to the war in Vietnam, that the so-called "hawks" and "right wing" are still suggesting that the Administration is not fully committed to a "win" policy.¹⁰ However, in order to determine whether this is a logical argument, one must first attempt to answer the question--what does "win" mean to the hawks? "Win" means different things to different people. To the "hawks", it clearly means forcing the enemy to surrender by destroying his capability and will to fight or resist, using whatever military power is required to accomplish the task, in the shortest time, with the least possible loss of American lives and treasure. Until this is done, the "hawks" feel there is little hope of achieving peace. As Senate GOP Leader Everett M. Dirksen put it: "We must have capitulation before we can have peace."¹¹ Senator John C. Stennis, Chairman of the Senate Preparedness Investigating Committee, expressed a similar view in a recent speech calling for decisive action to win in Vietnam. In discussing alternatives confronting the US, Senator Stennis cited withdrawal, which he called "unthinkable"; to be driven out which he said "must not happen"; a grinding war of attrition, which he believes "could last for 10 or 15 years," or

¹⁰"The Way Congress Sizes Up the War," U.S. News & World Report, Vol. 60, 31 Jan. 1966, pp. 28-31.

¹¹Everett M. Dirksen, as quoted by Newsweek, Vol. 67, 17 Jan. 1966, pp. 16-17.

We can bring to bear sufficient military might to force our Communist enemies to the conference table, or, failing that to defeat them on the field of battle. Only the last alternative offers us a chance of peace with honor . . . I believe that the sooner we undertake this mission, the less will be the cost in time and life.¹²

These views are shared by other members of Congress,¹³ many military personnel, including this writer, and others, which automatically places them in the "hawk" or "right wing" category as those terms seem to be defined today. Looking at the Administration policy of "measured response" or "controlled escalation" from the "hawk" or "right wing" view of what it means to win, one might logically conclude that the Administration is not "fully" committed to a "win" policy. However, there can be no question that the Administration is determined to live up to the United States commitment to assist the government and people of South Vietnam to repel Communist aggression and preserve their freedom. The real question is "how" can this best be accomplished, and only the President can make the decisions that are necessary in that regard.

The contention that France lost the War in Indochina because the Eisenhower Administration was not fully committed to a "win" policy, meaning military intervention, appears to have some validity. Intervention was threatened but, after much consideration, was rejected for both political and military reasons. From the political

¹²John C. Stennis, as quoted by U.S. News & World Report, Vol. 60, 7 Feb. 1966, p. 6.

¹³"The Way Congress Sizes Up the War," U.S. News & World Report, Vol. 60, 31 Jan. 1966, p. 29.

standpoint, President Eisenhower was convinced, first, that Ho Chi Minh and the Vietminh had the support of a majority of the Vietnamese people. Secondly, he was reluctant to attempt to involve American ground forces in another war so soon after Korea because of probable widespread public disapproval. Thirdly, certain Congressional leaders had made it clear that they would not support unilateral US intervention--"unified" action was considered essential, meaning participation of Britain and some of the Asian countries as a minimum and, hopefully, UN backing as in the case of Korea. Finally, President Eisenhower wanted to be assured by France that she would grant full independence to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, and that France itself would continue to fight until the war was won.¹⁴ From a strictly military standpoint, President Eisenhower at first seemed to favor a plan for employing US air and naval forces advanced by Admiral Radford (then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) but became convinced that they would have to be followed by US ground forces to achieve a military victory. This fact was brought out by General Ridgeway (then US Army Chief of Staff) who, after a detailed study of requirements, advised President Eisenhower that to go into Indochina and win would take not only air and naval forces but a very large and strong ground force, and the price would be "as great or greater than Korea".¹⁵ More recently, General Gavin

¹⁴Bator, op. cit., pp. 38-40, 49-50, 214-218; Scheer, op. cit., pp. 11-12; and US Congress, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Background Information Relating to Southeast Asia and Vietnam, p. 27 (referred to hereafter as "Congress, Background on Vietnam").

¹⁵Matthew B. Ridgeway, quoted from his memoirs in "A 1956 Warning on Land War in Asia," U.S. News & World Report, Vol. 60, 3 Jan. 1966, pp. 32-33.

(Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations under Ridgeway) reinforced this view-point, while Victor Bator notes that six authors searching for an explanation for Eisenhower's decision not to intervene agree that his unwillingness (also that of Congress) to use US ground forces was the most important consideration.¹⁶

Whether military intervention in 1954 would have been less costly in men, money and materiel than today's intervention will never be known. The reasons for not becoming militarily involved cited by Generals Ridgeway and Gavin 12 years ago--an exceedingly costly effort, danger of escalation to full-scale war with Red China where the US would be fighting her in the wrong place on her terms, and the possibility of Red China reopening the war on the Korean front--are generally the reasons being advanced today by critics of our increasing military buildup. There is, however, one important difference--we are involved--and it is time that we stopped worrying about world opinion and what Red China might do if we were to remove the constraints and use our military power to the fullest extent to force North Vietnam to capitulate. Another, is that in 1954 a majority of the Vietnamese people were fighting to win full independence and expel the French. Today the fight is between the Communist controlled North and anti-Communist controlled South Vietnam, which emerged from the 1954 Geneva Accords. However,

¹⁶James M. Gavin quoted from a letter to Harpers, Feb. 1966 in "Hold Enclaves, Stop Bombing," U.S. News & World Report, Vol. 60, 7 Feb. 1966, p. 26; Bator, op. cit., p. 216 and Fall, op. cit., p. 228.

there a growing belief among critics that the war in Vietnam is becoming a US war.

1954 GENEVA ACCORDS

The Geneva Accords ending the Indochina war have been the subject of much debate, many charges and countercharges of their violation, and some controversy over the practicality of returning to their "essentials" as a means of resolving the present conflict in Vietnam.

The settlement produced at the Geneva Conference was essentially a military truce between the French and Vietminh calling for a cease-fire; the establishment of a military demarcation line at about the 17th parallel and withdrawal of French forces south of the line and Vietminh forces to the north; freedom of the people to move to the north or south as they desired for a period of 300 days following the settlement (later extended by both sides); a restriction on the introduction of additional military personnel, arms and munitions, and new military bases; and, an International Control Commission to supervise execution of the settlement agreements. A "Final Declaration" on the settlement recognized the partition between North and South Vietnam as temporary and called for free elections to be held in July 1956 for reunification of the two Vietnams.¹⁷

¹⁷Congress, Background on Vietnam, pp. 50-59, and Frank N. Traeger, "Back to Geneva '54? An Act of Political Folly," Vietnam Perspectives, Vol. 1, Aug. 1965, pp. 2-7.

Although both the United States and South Vietnam were participants in the Geneva Conference, neither signed the Armistice Agreements nor the Final Declaration, and both issued unilateral statements repudiating all or part of the latter. The United States, however, did pledge not to use force to upset the agreements but warned that renewed aggression in violation of the agreements would be viewed as a serious threat to international peace and security.¹⁸ Victor Bator points out that only the documents "signed" by any of the participants at the Geneva Conference were the Armistice Agreements and these were signed by only the representatives of the French and Vietminh field commanders.¹⁹ Frank Traeger, in noting that the US and South Vietnam were not signatories to the Geneva agreements, points out that there is precedent in international law for observing treaties and agreements covering a zone or subject of interests, even if not a signatory. But, he asserts, that if any party to the agreement breaches it then others, and certainly nonsignatories, are not obligated to observe its terms.²⁰

Both sides in the present conflict have charged the other side with violating the terms of the Geneva Accords, and there is some support for both positions in the various reports of the International Control Commission. In order to determine who first violated the

¹⁸US Congress, House, Republican Conference, Committee on Planning and Research, Vietnam: Some Neglected Aspects of the Historical Record, 25 Aug. 1965, p. 7 (referred to hereafter as "Congress, Neglected Aspects Vietnam"), and Traeger, op. cit., p. 2.

¹⁹Bator, op. cit., p. 133.

²⁰Traeger, op. cit., p. 2.

agreements, how often and to what extent violations have occurred would entail a detailed study which time and space do not permit for this paper. The US and South Vietnam position as to "who cast the first stone" is that North Vietnam did when it failed to evacuate all Communist Vietminh supporters from South Vietnam to North Vietnam. The charge essentially is that North Vietnam left behind cadres and arms caches to resume the conflict at the opportune time. North Vietnam, on the other hand, feels that South Vietnam breeched the agreement by failing to hold elections in 1956 as prescribed.²¹ Suffice it to say, the Geneva Accords of 1954 did not bring peace to Vietnam because they did not provide for a political solution acceptable to all of the participants.

With the conclusion of the Geneva Conference, the United States set out to help South Vietnam build an independent state and to provide for its protection from Communist aggression. In furtherance of this approach, the United States offered aid to Ngo Dinh Diem, then Premier under Bao Dai, and quickly moved to establish the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization with the idea of a collective defense arrangement for Southeast Asia similar to the NATO arrangement in Europe. Its prime purpose was to provide a legal basis for containing communism in Southeast Asia. The Treaty which was drawn up, however, differed considerably.²²

²¹US Dept of State, A Threat to the Peace, pp. 3-4.

²²Bator, op. cit., pp. 161-165.

There is no stipulation in the Treaty that an attack on one is considered an attack on all, requiring collective response.²³ Moreover, South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia are not and could not be members of SEATO under the Geneva Accords, but they are protected by the "Protocol" to the Treaty. The protection accorded, however, depends upon how each Party reacts in accordance with its constitutional processes "to aggression by means of armed attack" in the Treaty area. The United States stated its understanding of the Treaty provisions, at the time of signing as follows:

The United States of America in executing the present Treaty does so with the understanding that its recognition of the effect of aggression and armed attack and its agreement with reference thereto in Article IV, paragraph 1, apply only to Communist aggression but affirms that in the event of other aggression or armed attack it will consult under the provisions of Article IV, paragraph 2.²⁴

It is apparent that the signing of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty marked the beginning of "increased" US involvement in Southeast Asia, which was further expanded when the United States began "direct" aid to the Indochina states. Although the United States continued to support the French forces in the area for awhile, eventually, in order to force France out of Vietnam, the United States cut-off aid for all French activities.²⁵ Thus, almost from the beginning of the post-Geneva era, it seems the

²³"Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty and Protocol Thereto, Sept. 8, 1954," Congress, Background on Vietnam, pp. 62-64.

²⁴Ibid., p. 65.

²⁵Bator, op. cit., p. 184.

United States was destined to increase both its involvement and the scope of its commitment in Vietnam.

US COMMITMENT TO SOUTH VIETNAM

President Johnson, Secretary Rusk and other Administration spokesmen have stated repeatedly that we are in Vietnam to honor a commitment first made by President Eisenhower in 1954 and, since then, reaffirmed by both President Kennedy and President Johnson. There can be no question that we have a commitment or what the commitment is today, but there is some question as to whether our present commitment is the same commitment made more than a decade ago.

In October 1954, President Eisenhower wrote a letter to President Diem in which he indicated that requests for economic aid to assist in the resettlement of people moving from North to South Vietnam were being fulfilled. He also indicated that the American Ambassador would explore with Diem the kind of aid program which would be most effective in stabilizing the government of South Vietnam. "The purpose of this offer", Eisenhower wrote:

. . . is to assist the Government of Vietnam in developing and maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means. The Government of the United States expects that this aid will be met by performance on the part of the Government of Vietnam in undertaking needed reforms. It hopes that such aid, combined with your own continuing efforts, will contribute effectively toward an independent Vietnam endowed with a strong government. Such a government would, I hope, be so responsive to the nationalist aspirations of its people, so enlightened in purpose and effective in performance,

that it will be respected both at home and abroad and discourage any who might wish to impose a foreign ideology on your free people.²⁶

It is apparent that the commitment made by President Eisenhower in 1954 was to provide economic and military aid to help build a strong, viable, anti-Communist government in South Vietnam. It clearly did not contemplate the deployment of American combat forces to Vietnam because that would have been inconsistent with Eisenhower's views at the time. He declined to do so only a few months earlier when the French needed help. Moreover, it must be remembered that French forces were still present in Vietnam and that the French were responsible, under the Geneva Accords, for carrying out the terms of the cease-fire agreement in South Vietnam. Eisenhower's 1954 letter, therefore, could not logically be construed as committing the United States to anything more than providing economic and military aid similar to that being provided to other countries under US Foreign and Military Aid Programs. Eisenhower confirmed this in an interview in August, 1965.²⁷ However, under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, which had been concluded by this time, there is a commitment or obligation to respond to aggression "by means of armed attack" in accordance with constitutional processes of the United States. But the "armed attack" envisaged was of the Korean type; we had not yet adopted the stand

²⁶Letter from President Eisenhower to President Diem, 23 Oct. 1954, in Congress, Background on Vietnam, pp. 67-68.

²⁷"Who Pledged What in Vietnam," U.S. News & World Report, Vol. 59, 30 Aug. 1965, p. 15.

that externally supported, Communist-led insurgency was tantamount to armed attack en masse across an international boundary. Former Secretary of State John Foster Dulles reflected the Administration view in a speech made on 11 June 1954 when he said:

At the moment, Indochina is the area where international communism most vigorously seeks expansion under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh . . .

The situation in Indochina is not that of open military aggression by the Chinese Communist regime. Thus, in Indochina, the problem is one of restoring tranquillity in an area where disturbances are fomented from Communist China, but where there is no open invasion of Communist China. . . .

. . . If the Chinese Communists were to show in Indochina or elsewhere that it is determined to pursue the path of overt military aggression, then the situation would be different and another issue would emerge. . . .

If such overt military aggression occurred, that would be a deliberate threat to the United States itself. The United States would of course invoke the processes of the United Nations and consult with its allies. But we could not escape ultimate responsibility for decisions closely touching our own security and self-defense. . . .

Your Government wants peace, and the American people want peace. But should there ever be openly launched an attack that the American people would clearly recognize as a threat to our own security, then the right of self-preservation would demand that we-- regardless of any country--meet the issue squarely. . . .²⁸

President Eisenhower renewed his earlier pledge in October 1960 when he wrote to President Diem to convey "our good wishes . . . on the fifth anniversary of the birth of the Republic of Vietnam." After commenting on the progress made and stepped up violence of Hanoi, he said:

²⁸John Foster Dulles, quoted in Congress, Background on Vietnam, pp. 26-27.

Although the main responsibility for guarding that independence will always, as it has in the past, belong to the Vietnamese people and their government, I want to assure you that for so long as our strength can be useful, the United States will continue to assist Vietnam in the difficult yet hopeful struggle ahead.²⁹

There is nothing in this renewed pledge that would indicate a change in the United States commitment made by President Eisenhower in October 1954.

In December 1961, President Kennedy reaffirmed America's pledge and promised increased assistance. In his letter to President Diem, Kennedy wrote:

. . . Your letter underlines what our own information has convincingly shown--that the campaign of force and terror now being waged against your people and your Government is supported and directed from the outside by the authorities at Hanoi. They have thus violated the provisions of the Geneva Accords. . .

At that time, the United States, although not a party to the Accords, declared that 'it would view any renewal of aggression in violation of the agreements with grave concern and as seriously threatening international peace and security.' We continue to maintain that view.

In accordance with that declaration, and in response to your request, we are prepared to help the Republic of Vietnam to protect its independence. We shall promptly increase our assistance to your defense effort as well as help relieve the destruction of the floods which you describe. . .

. . . If the Communist authorities in North Vietnam will stop their campaign to destroy the Republic of Vietnam, the measures we are taking to assist your defense efforts will no longer be necessary. . .³⁰

²⁹Letter from President Eisenhower to President Diem, 26 Oct. 1960, in Why Vietnam, pp. 2-3.

³⁰Letter from President Kennedy to President Diem, 14 Dec. 1961, in Congress, Background on Vietnam, p. 84.

Although President Kennedy's letter does not specify what kind of increased assistance would be provided and might be interpreted as meaning sending US forces, subsequent statements of President Kennedy and others appear to rule out such intention. For example, Secretary Rusk, at a news conference on 1 Mar. 1962, said:

. . . We have noted recent comments from Peiping, Moscow and Hanoi about the nature and purposes of American aid to Vietnam. . .

These comments from Communist capitals wholly neglect the fact that the Republic of Vietnam is under attack of Communist guerrillas who are directed, trained, supplied, and reinforced by North Vietnam--all in gross violation of the 1954 Geneva Accords. . .

United States military and economic assistance and technical advice are being extended to the Republic of Vietnam at its request to assist the Vietnamese people to maintain their independence against this aggression. . .

The United States is assisting with training, logistics, transportation, and advisory personnel to enable the Government of Vietnam to deal with this conspiratorial effort to take over that country by violent means. We have no combat units in that country, and we have no desire for military bases or other United States military advantages. All we want is that the Vietnamese be free to determine their own future.³¹

And President Kennedy, in a TV interview on 2 Sep. 1963, said:

I don't think that unless a greater effort is made by the Government /Diem's regime/ to win popular support that the war can be won out there. In the final analysis, it is their war. They are the ones who have to win or lose it. We can help them, we can give them equipment, we can send our men out there as advisers, but they have to win it--the people of Vietnam--against the Communists. We are

³¹Dean Rusk, as quoted in Congress, Background on Vietnam, pp. 88-89.

prepared to continue to assist them, but I don't think the war can be won unless the people support the effort. . . .³²

When President Kennedy's pledge is considered in the light of subsequent statements and events that occurred while he was in office, it is quite apparent that he did not intend to commit the United States to active participation in the fighting in Vietnam. He did increase the number of advisers and provided helicopter and air transport lift. President Kennedy, of course, was aware of the United States commitment or obligation to South Vietnam under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty. The same Treaty covers Laos and, although a similar situation prevailed, he chose a negotiated settlement in the case of Laos in 1962.

President Kennedy's decision to backdown in Laos has been criticized as leading the Communists to believe that the United States would not invoke the Treaty to come to the aid of South Vietnam.³³ This may be true, but the critics do not point out that Kennedy undoubtedly was influenced by other events as well as the problem of making a Communist led-insurgency, supported externally, fit the Treaty provision of "aggression by means of armed attack." We can only speculate, but the "Bay of Pigs" fiasco, and the "Berlin Wall" and "Cuban Missile" crises probably had considerable bearing on his restraint in both Laos and Vietnam. However, the problem of convincing the American people that North Vietnam's support of the

³²John F. Kennedy, as quoted in Congress, Background on Vietnam, p. 99.
³³Congress, Neglected Aspects Vietnam, pp. 14-16, 19.

Communist-led insurgencies in Laos and South Vietnam was the same as attack across the Laotian border or 17th parallel by regular North Vietnamese armed forces, most likely was the decisive factor in Kennedy's decision to negotiate on Laos. This is a difficult concept to convey as evidenced by the lack of support the United States has received from other major Free-World powers.

It appears that neither President Eisenhower nor President Kennedy pledged or committed the United States to provide combat forces to assist South Vietnam in defending its independence and freedom against the Communist-led insurgency inspired, directed, and supported by North Vietnam. Both were aware of the United States responsibilities under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty. However, neither chose to exercise them apparently because neither felt that the Treaty provisions could be invoked under conditions prevailing at the time. Therefore, even though the broad commitment to help the South Vietnamese people and government preserve their independence is still the same commitment made more than a decade ago, the kind of help we are now committed to provide has clearly changed. This change has occurred gradually over the past two years as circumstances changed and it became increasingly clear that the South Vietnamese were no longer capable of carrying on the fight without the help of others.

President Johnson recognized the dangerous situation in Southeast Asia as early as 1961 and pointed out to President Kennedy that sooner or later a decision would have to be made to either "Commit major US forces to the area or cut our losses and withdraw

should our efforts fail."³⁴ With President Kennedy's assassination, Lyndon Johnson became President and was faced with making that decision.

President Johnson apparently also recognized that such a decision would be politically explosive unless the American people were psychologically prepared to support a decision to commit US forces to the war in Vietnam. Consequently, he carefully avoided making any statements that might indicate that US forces would be required to enter the war in Vietnam until after the elections in 1964. Even after the Gulf of Tonkin incidents in August 1964, his statements were worded so as to allay any fears of a major US involvement unless US forces were attacked. For example, on 12 August 1964, he said:

For 10 years, through the Eisenhower administration, the Kennedy administration, and this administration, we have had one consistent aim-observance of the 1954 agreements which guaranteed the independence of South Vietnam.

That independence has been the consistent target of aggression and terror. For 10 years our response to these attacks has followed a consistent pattern:

First, that the South Vietnamese have the basic responsibility for the defense of their own freedom.

Second, we would engage our strength and our resources to whatever extent needed to help others repel aggression.

Now there are those who would have us depart from these tested principles. They have a variety of viewpoints. . . .

³⁴Ibid., p. 13.

Some say that we should withdraw from South Vietnam. . . But the United States cannot and must not and will not turn aside and allow the freedom of a brave people to be handed over to Communist tyranny. This alternative is strategically unwise, we think, and it is morally unthinkable.

Some others are eager to enlarge the conflict. They call upon us to supply American boys to do the job that Asian boys should do. They ask us to take reckless action which might risk the lives of millions and engulf much of Asia and certainly threaten the peace of the world. Moreover such action would offer no solution at all to the real problem of Vietnam. America can and America will meet any wider challenge from others, but our aim in Vietnam, as in the rest of the world, is to help to restore the peace and to reestablish a decent order.³⁵

Again, on 29 August 1964, President Johnson said:

I have had advice to load our planes with bombs and drop them on certain areas that I think would enlarge the war, and result in committing a good many American boys to fighting a war that I think ought to be fought by the boys of Asia to help protect their own land. And for that reason, I haven't chosen to enlarge the war.³⁶

And, on 1 December 1964, the President reaffirmed the basic US policy of providing "all possible and useful assistance to the South Vietnamese people and government in their struggle to defeat the externally supported insurgency and aggression being conducted against them."³⁷

It is apparent from the foregoing statements of Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson that during the period following the Geneva Accords from 1954 through 1964 the United States commitment to South Vietnam was in essence a commitment to help the

³⁵Congress, Background on Vietnam, p. 131.

³⁶Congress, Neglected Aspects Vietnam, p. 20.

³⁷Congress, Background on Vietnam, p. 136.

government and the people to help themselves. The commitment was to be honored not by employing US military forces in a combat role, but by providing economic aid and military assistance in the form of equipment, funds, trainers, and advisers similar to other military assistance programs. Even after the Gulf of Tonkin incidents the commitment did not really change because our response was limited to a single raid in retaliation for the unprovoked attacks of 2 and 4 August 1964 on US naval vessels. However, those attacks did result in a congressional joint resolution, approved by a combined vote of 502 to 2, which supported "the determination of the President, as Commander-in-Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." The resolution further stated that the US regards maintenance of international peace and security as vital to its national interest, and in accordance with the US Constitution, UN Charter and US obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, "is prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member or protocol state of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom."³⁸

There can be no question that the joint resolution of Congress gave President Johnson the clear authority to expand our commitment to South Vietnam to include the provision of US military forces and

³⁸Ibid., p. 128.

their employment in a combat role as active partners in the defense of South Vietnam. Thus, on 7 February 1965, when the President approved the bombing of selected military targets in North Vietnam in reprisal for Viet Cong attacks earlier that day on the US barracks at Pleiku, and other US and South Vietnamese installations, the wider commitment had begun. This became even more apparent when, on the same day, the President announced that he had directed the orderly withdrawal of American dependents - "to clear the decks and make absolutely clear our continued determination to back South Vietnam in its fight to maintain its independence." He further stated, "In addition to this action, I have ordered the deployment to South Vietnam of a Hawk air defense battalion, other reinforcements, in units and individuals, may follow."³⁹ Shortly thereafter, on 17 Feb. 1965, the President in his closing of an address before the National Industrial Conference Board in Washington, D.C. said, in part:

As I have said so many, many times, and other Presidents ahead of me have said, our purpose, our objective there /Vietnam/ is clear. That purpose and objective is to join in the defense and protection of freedom of a brave people who are under attack that is directed and controlled from outside their country.

We have no ambitions there for ourselves. We seek no dominion. We seek no conquest. We seek no wider war. But all must understand that we will persist in the defense of freedom, and our continuing actions will be those which are justified and those that are made necessary by the continuing aggression of others.

³⁹"White House Press Release, 7 Feb.," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. 52, 22 Feb. 1965, p. 239.

These actions will be measured, fitting and adequate. Our stamina and the stamina of the American people is equal to the task.⁴⁰

At this point, the US commitment clearly changed to one of "joining in the defense and protection of the freedom" of the Vietnamese people or, in other words, participating in the fighting as allies rather than providing military assistance in the form of equipment, training and advice. Subsequent statements have more clearly set forth the commitment to join in the fighting, although the change in commitment was very gradually presented to the public. Undoubtedly, this slow build-up was designed not to alarm the American people until the Administration could also make it clear that the war in Vietnam was not simply a civil or revolutionary war but a war of aggression by one independent state against another. The US State Department "White Paper", Aggression From the North, which was published on 25 Feb. 1965, presents the evidence in that regard.⁴¹

The following excerpts from statements made by President Johnson illustrate how the change in our commitment to include US forces in an active combat role was slowly brought to the attention of the American people in a manner designed to win their support. President Johnson on 25 Mar. 1965:⁴²

⁴⁰Lyndon B. Johnson as quoted in "Recent Statements of U.S. Vietnam Policy," Congressional Digest, Vol. 44, April 1965, p. 105.

⁴¹US Dept of State, Aggression from the North, Publication 7839, Feb. 1965. (Text, less photos, also in State Department Bulletin, Vol. 52, 22 Mar. 1965, pp. 404-426.)

⁴²Lyndon B. Johnson as quoted in Department of State Bulletin, Vol. 52, 12 Apr. 1965, p. 527.

It is important for us all to keep a cool and clear view of the situation in Vietnam.

The central cause of danger there is aggression by Communists against a brave and independent people. There are other difficulties in Vietnam, of course, but if that aggression is stopped, the people and Government of South Vietnam will be free to settle their own future, and the need for supporting American military action there will end.

President Johnson on 7 Apr. 1965:⁴³

Tonight Americans and Asians are dying for a world where each people may choose its own path to change. This is the principle for which our ancestors fought in the valleys of Pennsylvania. It is a principle for which our sons fight tonight in the jungles of Vietnam.

We are there /Vietnam/ because we have a promise to keep. Since 1954 every American President has offered support to the people of South Vietnam. We have helped to build, and we have helped to defend. Thus, over many years we have made a national pledge to help South Vietnam defend its independence.

And I intend to keep that promise.

In recent months attacks on South Vietnam were stepped up. Thus it became necessary for us to increase our response and to make attacks by air. This is not a change of purpose. It is a change in what we believe that purpose requires.

We do this in order to slow down aggression.

We do this to increase the confidence of the brave people of South Vietnam who have bravely borne this battle for so many years with so many casualties.

And we do this to convince the leaders of North Vietnam and all who seek to share their conquest-of a simple fact:

We will not be defeated.

We will not grow tired.

⁴³Lyndon B. Johnson as quoted in Department of State Bulletin, Vol. 52, 26 Apr. 1965, pp. 606-607.

We will not withdraw, either openly, or under the cloak of a meaningless agreement. . . .

President Johnson on 4 May 1965:⁴⁴

. . . South Vietnam has been attacked by North Vietnam. It has asked our help. We are giving that help, we are giving it because of our commitments, because of our principles, and because we believe our national interest demands it.

This is not the same kind of aggression which the world has long been used to. Instead of the sweep of invading armies there is the steady and the deadly attack in the night of guerrilla bands that come without warning, that kill people while they sleep.

In Vietnam we pursue the same principle which has infused American action in the Far East for a quarter of a century. There are those who ask why this responsibility should be ours. The answer, I think, is simple. There is no one else who can do the job. Our power alone, in the final test, can stand between expanding communism and independent Asian nations.

Thus, when India was attacked, it looked to us for help and we gave it immediately. . . .

Now make no mistake about it, the aim in Vietnam is not simply the conquest of the South, tragic as that would be. It is to show that American commitment is worthless, and they would like very much to do that, and once they succeed in doing that, the gates are down and the road is open to expansion and to endless conquest. Moreover we are directly committed to the defense of South Vietnam beyond any question.

In 1954 we signed the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty and that Treaty committed us to act to meet aggression against South Vietnam. The United States Senate was called upon to act upon that treaty. It ratified that treaty and obligation by a roll-call vote of 82 to 1. Less than a year ago, the Congress, by an almost unanimous vote, a vote of 502 to 2, said that the United States was ready to take all necessary steps

⁴⁴Lyndon B. Johnson as quoted in Department of State Bulletin, Vol. 52, 24 May 1965, p. 817.

to meet its obligations under that treaty. That resolution in the Congress expressed support for the policy of three successive American Presidents to help the people of South Vietnam against attack.

Thus we cannot and we will not and we must not withdraw or be defeated. The stakes are too high, the commitment too deep, the lessons of history too plain. . . .

President Johnson on 28 July 1965:⁴⁵

. . . This is a different kind of war. There are no marching armies or solemn declarations. Some citizens of South Vietnam, at times with understandable grievances, have joined in the attack on their own government. But we must not let this mask the central fact that this is really war. It is guided by North Vietnam and spurred by Communist China. Its goal is to conquer the South, to defeat American power, and to extend the Asiatic dominion of Communism.

And there are great stakes in the balance.

Most of the non-Communist nations of Asia cannot, by themselves and alone, resist the growing might and grasping ambition of Asian communism. Our power, therefore, is a vital shield. If we are driven from the field in Vietnam, then no nation can ever again have the same confidence in American promise, or in American protection. In each land the forces of independence would be considerably weakened. And an Asia so threatened by Communist domination would imperil the security of the United States itself.

We did not choose to be the guardians at the gate but there is no one else. . .

Moreover we are in Vietnam to fulfill one of the most solemn pledges of the American nation. Three Presidents . . . over 11 years, have committed themselves and have promised to help defend this small and valiant nation.

Strengthened by that promise, the people of South Vietnam have fought for many long years. Thousands of them have died. Thousands more have been crippled and scarred by war. We cannot now dishonor our word or

⁴⁵Lyndon B. Johnson, as quoted in Why Vietnam, pp. 5-6.

abandon our commitment or leave those who believed us and who trusted us to the terror and repression and murder that would follow. . . .

. . . We intend to convince the Communists that we cannot be defeated by force of arms or by superior power. They are not easily convinced. In recent months they have greatly increased their fighting forces, their attacks, and the number of incidents. I have asked . . . General Westmoreland what more he needs to meet this mounting aggression. He has told me. We will meet his needs.

I have today ordered to Vietnam the Air Mobile Division and certain other forces which will increase our fighting strength from 75,000 to 125,000 men almost immediately. Additional forces will be needed later, and they will be sent as requested. . . .

The above speeches stress "national pledge" and "national honor." Later speeches emphasize "defense of freedom," the traditional rallying cry for the American people. Such reliance on these tried and true phrases points up the problem of conveying, convincingly, to the American people the concept that armed attack by infiltration is equivalent to armed attack across an international boundary.

SUMMARY

The US involvement in Vietnam began in 1950 when the decision was made to provide military aid to France for prosecution of the war effort in Indochina. Although the US literally financed the war from 1950 to 1954, money and materiel alone were not enough to prevent the defeat of the French. Following the Geneva Accords of 1954, the US involvement began to deepen when it was decided that economic and military aid for Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam would be

furnished directly to those countries. This decision was followed by a decision to discontinue all support for the French in Indochina which forced them to withdraw, leaving the United States as the sole protector and supporter of the non-Communist South. Thus, almost from the start of the post Geneva era, the United States has been directly involved in Vietnam.

Although this involvement was initially limited to the provision of economic and military assistance in the usual sense, it has in the past four years been expanded in an effort to halt the increasing aggression of the Communists. First, by increasing the number of US military advisers and by providing helicopter and air transport lift for the South Vietnamese forces. Secondly, by the provision of US forces to assist the Vietnamese forces in defending their country. All of these actions are the outgrowth of a US commitment first made in 1954 by President Eisenhower, and an obligation to respond to Communist aggression under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty signed about the same time.

The US commitment, as first conceived, was to provide economic and military assistance to South Vietnam in the hope of building a strong, viable, government capable of resisting Communist aggression from either internal or external sources. The SEATO arrangement was designed to forestall and, if necessary, cope with external Communist aggression which could not be repelled without outside help. The aggression envisaged was by armed attack across an international boundary similar to the Communist aggression in Korea. Communist subversion and insurgency from within, but sponsored and

supported from without, was recognized as a threat. However, no one seemed to know how this type of aggression could be identified as being the same as an overt attack by regular military forces across an international boundary in a manner which would make the situation unmistakably clear to the American people and other Free-World countries. For this reason, primarily, but also because of the crises which arose from time-to-time in other parts of the world, both Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy limited the US commitment to economic and military assistance in the normal sense, and did not attempt to invoke the provisions of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty.

President Johnson came into office at a time when the situation in Vietnam had begun to rapidly deteriorate. The South Vietnamese regime of President Diem, which the US had supported for some ten years, had been overthrown and no one knew what the new military regime might do. Successive "coups" during the following months added to the confusion making it extremely difficult to determine what kind of assistance was needed and to whom it should be provided. Moreover, at that time President Johnson had domestic and political problems at home. Faced with these and the fact that he had come into office as the result of President Kennedy's assassination, he probably felt committed to continuing the policies and programs of the Kennedy administration, at least until such time as he or someone else was elected to that high office. Everyone knows that the Communists are quick to recognize and exploit such unsettled situations, which they did. Thus, by February 1965, South Vietnam

was well on the way to being lost to the Communists, and dramatic, positive action was needed to reverse this trend. President Johnson initiated such action by ordering air attacks on North Vietnam, the withdrawal of US dependents from South Vietnam, and the deployment of a Hawk air defense battalion to South Vietnam. These actions were taken to make it crystal clear to the Communist leaders in North Vietnam, and their supporters in Moscow and Peking, that the US had no intention of letting South Vietnam fall to communism.

But, President Johnson still was confronted with the same problem that apparently had plagued President Eisenhower and President Kennedy. How could the American people and our Free-World partners be made to understand that the Communist aggression in South Vietnam was no different than the Communist aggression in Korea--that only the Communist tactics and strategy were different. He has attempted to do this in his own speeches and policy statements as well as those of other government officials. In addition, the story has been told in numerous government publications, the most notable being the State Department "White Paper", Aggression from the North. However, this is a difficult concept to convey. Consequently, great stress has been placed on honoring a national pledge--the promise of three Presidents--to help the South Vietnamese defend their freedom, and our obligation under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty. These are principles which the majority of the American people have traditionally responded to without question, and they have done so in the case of South Vietnam.

The voices of dissent, however, have begun to grow louder both in the Congress and among other prominent, responsible Americans. There are some who feel we are not doing enough, while others contend we are doing too much and are headed toward a wider war. But only the President can make the decisions that must be made, and only time will tell whether he made the right decisions. In the meantime, we are committed to the war in Vietnam, the commitment of resources, both human and material, has grown in the last year and undoubtedly will continue to grow in the year ahead and future years until we achieve our objectives. Let us turn next to a consideration of those objectives.

CHAPTER 4

US OBJECTIVES IN VIETNAM

The United States objectives in Vietnam have been stated many times and in many different ways by President Johnson and other high Administration officials. But they cannot be found neatly packaged in any single document. Moreover, these objectives have been stated in broad, general, or seemingly oversimplified terms such as "to bring peace to Southeast Asia", "to halt Communist expansion", "to contain Communist China", "to prevent the success of aggression", "to prevent the forceful conquest of South Vietnam by North Vietnam", "to stop North Vietnam from doing what it is doing and knows it is doing in South Vietnam", "to prove that 'wars of national liberation' cannot succeed", "to restore the conditions contemplated by the Geneva Accords of 1954", "to prove the value of an American commitment", and "to preserve the freedom and independence of South Vietnam". At the same time it has been said that we seek "no wider war", "no military bases", "no territory", "no dominion over any other people, nor the destruction of any other government". Thus, there is little wonder that the American people seem to be confused at times as to exactly what our objectives are in Vietnam. Furthermore, it is difficult to understand what our objectives are in Vietnam unless we also consider our wider purposes in the world, our objectives in Southeast Asia as a whole, and how our objectives relate to our national interests.

THE BIG PICTURE

Since the end of World War II, the United States and other Free-World countries have sought to maintain peace and stability throughout the world so that all nations might live in harmony and develop in their own way at their own pace. This in essence was the purpose of the United Nations organization. However, it soon became apparent that the Communist nations were not content to live and let live. Instead, they set out to extend Communist power and control over neighboring nations with a view toward eventual Communist domination of the world. Thus, for many years Communist expansion has been regarded as the major threat to international peace and security.

To counter that threat the Truman Doctrine was announced in 1947. Since then it has been a basic United States policy to contain communism by aiding any country with whom we are allied or committed to defend to prevent the extension of Communist power by use of force. It was in furtherance of this policy that we helped Greece and the Philippines in putting down the Communist inspired insurgencies in those nations, that we came to the aid of South Korea when attacked by Communist North Korea, and that today we are helping South Vietnam to resist the expansionist aims of North Vietnam.¹

But the Truman Doctrine was not the only step taken to meet the Communist threat. We instituted the Marshall Plan to help

¹Dean Rusk, "Some Fundamentals of American Policy," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. 52, 22 Mar. 1965, p. 400.

rebuild and strengthen the nations of Western Europe. We were instrumental in bringing about the North Atlantic Treaty Organization--a collective security arrangement--which, since 1949 has served to stop further Soviet expansion and aggression in Europe. And, in 1954, we promoted the establishment of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization for the primary purpose of halting Communist expansion in that part of the world. The Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty was particularly aimed at Communist China with the hope of containing her within her present borders. In addition, we entered into a number of bilateral defense pacts for similar purposes with free nations on the periphery of the Communist world.² Thus, for nearly a quarter of a century the United States has considered it to be in its national interest to meet head-on the threat of Communist expansion, when such expansion is undertaken by means of force against any ally or country we are committed to defend. Clearly, it is this kind of threat which confronts the United States in Vietnam today. And we are meeting it.

Secretary of State Dean Rusk summed up the long range goal of US Foreign policy in an address on 16 October 1965 as follows:

Our goal is the sort of world community sketched in the preamble and articles 1 and 2 of the United Nations Charter - a world of independent nations, each with the institutions of its own choice but cooperating with one another to promote the mutual interests of their citizens, a world free of aggression, a world which moves toward

²Dean Rusk, from the text of a statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 18 Feb. 1966, as quoted in U.S. News & World Report, Vol. 60, 28 Feb. 1966, pp. 76-77.

the rule of law, a world in which human rights are secure, a world of better life for all of mankind.

That goal may seem distant, But is a working guide
to our foreign policy. . .³

It is evident that the ultimate goal of the United States in Southeast Asia as a whole, and in Vietnam in particular, is essentially the same as the world-wide goal cited above. But, to attain this end, there must first be stability. Therefore, we also seek to maintain the balance of power that currently exists in that area.⁴ President Eisenhower first recognized and made this clear when he announced, in 1954, the so-called "Domino Theory". This theory holds that if one nation in the Southeast Asia area falls to Communist aggression, then the others eventually also will follow suit. Both the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations have adhered to this basic concept, despite the arguments advanced by critics which suggest that the theory is invalid.⁵ As a result, our objectives in Vietnam are tied to the principle that failure to stand firm in Vietnam will mean taking a stand somewhere else at a later date and, perhaps, under less favorable circumstances. Let us turn, then to our immediate objectives in Vietnam.

³Dean Rusk, "The Unseen Search for Peace," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. 53, 1 Nov. 1965, p. 690.

⁴George W. Ball, "The Issue in Vietnam," Department of State Bulletin, Vol. 54, 14 Feb. 1966, pp. 240-241.

⁵See for example, Frank Church, "The Basic Flaw in our Asian Strategy," Washington Post, 20 Feb. 1966, p. E3, and Hans J. Morgenthau, "We are Deluding Ourselves in Vietnam," New York Times Magazine, 18 Apr. 1965, pp. 25, 85-87.

IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVES

As previously mentioned our objectives in Vietnam have been stated many times and in different ways, and cannot be found in any single document. However, it is believed that our immediate goals can be summarized as follows:⁶

1. To prove to the people and government of South Vietnam and other Free-World nations that the United States stands by its commitments.
2. To prove to the Communist-World that "wars of national liberation" are not a means for spreading communism which cannot be stopped by the Free-World.
3. To convince Hanoi, Moscow and Peiping that we have drawn a line in Southeast Asia beyond which communism will not be permitted to expand by force of arms.
4. To persuade North Vietnam to withdraw its regular army units from South Vietnam and to stop supplying the Viet Cong with arms, men, munitions, and other logistical support.
5. To assist the South Vietnamese forces in rooting out and destroying Viet Cong main-force units.
6. To assist the South Vietnamese government in bringing about economic, political, and social reforms that will win the people over to the government.

⁶Derived from various statements made by President Johnson, Secretary Rush and other Administration spokesmen.

7. To obtain a political settlement that will guarantee the freedom and independence of South Vietnam as envisaged in the 1954 Geneva Accords.

In order to assess these objectives certain questions must be answered. Are these objectives realistic and attainable? Are the actions being taken to achieve them leading to their successful and timely achievement? Are there other actions which could be taken that might be more effective?

The first objective--to prove . . . the United States stands by its commitments--is clearly realistic and attainable from a US and South Vietnam point of view. However, it may not be realistic to the people of other Southeast Asian nations, because of our lack of firmness in Laos in 1962. We have, of course, proved the point to our European, Middle Eastern and South Asian friends on a number of occasions. Moreover, we continue to assist them or assure them of our help even though they may trade with the enemy and give us little or no support in Vietnam. Thus, there can be no question in their minds that we will stand by our commitments.

The second objective--to prove . . . that "wars of national liberation" cannot succeed--is realistic and attainable, provided we do not falter in our purpose or become so engrossed in our quest for peace that we are willing to make concessions at the conference table which will permit the Communists to achieve their ultimate goal in Vietnam. In 1962 we accepted a coalition government in Laos, permitted what has amounted to the division of Laos into Communist and non-Communist zones and, from the start, have allowed

North Vietnam to violate and continue violating the 1962 Geneva settlement of the Laotian question. Hopefully we have learned from our experience in 1962 what we failed to learn after living for eight years with the Geneva Accords of 1954. The actions now being taken to achieve this objective appear to be leading to its successful accomplishment. The question of timeliness of accomplishment is another matter and will be discussed later as it applies to several of the objectives.

The third objective--to convince Hanoi, Moscow and Peiping that we have drawn a line in Southeast Asia--is realistic and attainable, subject to the same proviso indicated for the second objective. Actions now being taken appear to be leading to successful achievement of this objective. The continuing buildup of American forces in South Vietnam, the resumption of bombing in North Vietnam, and repeated statements to the effect that we will not withdraw our forces until North Vietnam stops its aggression and the freedom and independence of South Vietnam is effectively guaranteed, eventually should convince Hanoi, Moscow and Peiping that the line has been drawn. But we should not lose sight of the fact that what may seem creditable to us may not seem creditable to the Communists, particularly the Chinese Communists. They may view our force buildup in Vietnam as falling directly in line with their theory that we can be defeated if we are forced to respond to "people's wars" in many regions simultaneously. As Lin Piao put it:

The more successful the development of people's war in a given region, the larger the number of US imperialist forces that can be pinned down and depleted

there. When the US aggressors are hard-pressed in one place, they have no alternative but to loosen their grip on others. Therefore, the conditions become more favorable for the people elsewhere to wage struggles against US imperialism . . .

Everything is divisible, and so is this colossus of US imperialism. The peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America, and other regions can destroy it piece by piece . . . That is why the greatest fear of US imperialism is that people's wars will be launched in different parts of the world . . . and why it regards people's war as a mortal danger.

History has proved and will go on proving that people's war is the most effective weapon against US imperialism . . . All revolutionary people will learn to wage people's war against US imperialism . . . US imperialism, like a mad bull dashing from place to place, will finally be burned to ashes in the blazing fires of the people's wars it has provoked by its own actions.⁷

The fourth objective--to persuade North Vietnam to withdraw its regular army units from South Vietnam and to stop supplying the Viet Cong--is realistic and attainable, but only over an extended period of time, if we continue to limit our actions against North Vietnam and continue to assure its Communist leaders that we will restrict the bulk of the destruction of war to South Vietnam. President Johnson has made it crystal clear that our air attacks on North Vietnam will be limited to strictly military targets such as roads, bridges, ammunition dumps, supply depots, and other military installations which facilitate the infiltration of men and supplies into South Vietnam.⁸ Moreover, it has been stated that

⁷"Lin Piao Article Commemorating V-J Day Anniversary," Daily Report - Far East Supplement, 3 Sep. 1965, pp. 26-27.

⁸Lyndon B. Johnson, as quoted in Department of State Bulletin, Vol. 52, 24 May 1965, p. 818, and Washington Post, 1 Feb. 1966, p. A8.

the prime purpose of such attacks is "to slow down aggression" rather than to stop it.⁹ The President also has said time and time again that our response to aggression has been and will continue to be measured and carefully controlled, because we seek no wider war nor the destruction of any regime. On the other hand we have gone to great lengths to establish that North Vietnam is seeking to conquer South Vietnam by armed aggression and that North Vietnam has escalated the war by its increased aggression through the infiltration of additional men and arms into South Vietnam. At the same time we have repeatedly pointed out that we were compelled to send US ground forces to South Vietnam because as the President recently put it, "tens of thousands of invaders came South before them" and that our numbers have increased because "the aggression of others has increased."¹⁰ Thus, it would appear that we are saying to North Vietnam--if you continue to increase your aggression in South Vietnam we will continue to increase our response to such aggression but we will limit our increased response and the fighting to South Vietnam. In other words, we seem to be assuring Ho Chi Minh that the destruction and ravages of war will be confined, except for strictly military targets in the north, to South Vietnam. One might then ask how we and the government of South Vietnam can ever expect to win the hearts and minds of the South Vietnamese people

⁹Lyndon B. Johnson, as quoted in Department of State Bulletin, Vol. 52, 26 Apr. 1965, p. 607.

¹⁰Lyndon B. Johnson, as quoted in Washington Post, 24 Feb. 1966, p. A18.

when we say, in essence, that we will continue to limit for the most part the destruction of hamlets, villages, rice paddies, and even people who happen to be in the way, to South Vietnam. It is the people of South Vietnam who have borne the brunt of the war for more than a decade. It is their hamlets and villages that are being fought over and change hands time and time again. It is their homes; their rice paddies and ancestral grounds that are being devastated. It is they who are being forced to move to refugee centers to escape the ravages of war. All of this, while their fellow countrymen in the north continue to live in comparative safety with their hamlets, villages, rice paddies, and ancestral grounds virtually immune from attack. So long as the people of North Vietnam do not have to face the ravages of war, they undoubtedly will continue to support their Communist leaders. On the other hand if conditions become so intolerable that fear of not supporting the regime appears to be the lesser of two evils, they may well demand that their government seek an end to the war in Vietnam. The leaders of Communist nations such as North Vietnam and Red China have long recognized that they must have the support of their people to survive and have relaxed their demands when it became apparent that the people were beginning to balk. It is doubtful, that "Aggression from the North" will stop until it becomes apparent to the people and the government of North Vietnam that the price they must pay to continue aggression is too high.

The fifth objective--to assist the South Vietnamese forces in rooting out and destroying Viet Cong main-force units--is realistic

and attainable, and the actions now being taken to achieve it appear to be leading to its successful accomplishment. However, the time required to complete the task is contingent upon the time needed to persuade North Vietnam to stop supporting the Viet Cong as well as the time needed for the government to win the active support of the South Vietnamese people. Once the Viet Cong are cut-off from their prime source of supply and the people are willing to provide intelligence as to the whereabouts of Viet Cong units, this objective probably can be achieved in a relatively short period of time. Of course, there is always the possibility that these units will withdraw to sanctuaries in Cambodia and Laos, but with North Vietnam out of the picture these sanctuaries also will probably disappear. Consequently, the personnel of the Viet Cong main-force units, at some point in time, will be faced with a choice between infiltrating back into their hamlets and villages in the south or north as the case may be, or seeking refuge in Cambodia and Laos. In either case they will no longer present a major military threat to South Vietnam.

The sixth objective--to assist the South Vietnamese government in bringing about economic, social and political reforms that will win the people over to the government--is realistic and probably attainable but, without question, the most difficult to achieve of all the objectives. It is obvious that the actions taken in the past were unsuccessful. Current actions appear to be meeting with some success, but it is equally apparent that attainment of this objective is a long way off. First of all, it is generally

recognized that needed reforms cannot be effectively carried out until the government can provide at least reasonable security for the people. This means, as a minimum, eliminating the threat of attacks on government forces by battalion size Viet Cong main-force and North Vietnamese regular army units, so that government forces can concentrate on eliminating or reducing to tolerable limits terrorist attacks by smaller groups of guerrillas on hamlets and villages. As previously noted, this task will require considerable time. Secondly, most authorities seem to agree that there must be a stable central government and leaders at all government levels in which the people have confidence in order to establish lasting reforms. Since 1954, this has been an elusive goal and still appears to be far from attainment because of the continuing struggle for power among South Vietnamese military, political and religious leaders as evidenced by the number and frequency of "coups" in the past two and half years. In addition ever since the Diem regime, leaders at the lower levels have been appointed rather than elected, and usually change with each change in the central government. Finally, the central government has repeatedly made promises to improve the lot of the people which it has been unable to fulfill or to continue if started. All of these factors undoubtedly have contributed to the lack of confidence in the central government and its leaders at all levels, while providing the Communists with considerable ammunition for their propaganda campaigns.

The seventh objective--to obtain a political settlement that will guarantee the freedom and independence of South Vietnam as envisaged in the 1954 Geneva Accords--is realistic and attainable. The actions being taken appear to be leading to its attainment. However, the timing for achievement cannot be predicted because it is contingent upon the time required to accomplish our military objectives. Neither we nor South Vietnam can reasonably expect to win at the conference table what we have not previously won on the battlefield. In the final analysis, we are seeking, as a minimum, the continuation of two Vietnams each free to develop in its own way at its own pace, with the right of self-determination for the people of South Vietnam assured by appropriate guarantees against Communist intimidation. Should the people of South Vietnam freely choose a Communist regime or a coalition government, and we have gone on record as saying we would accept their decision in this regard, we will have achieved this immediate goal but will have failed to achieve the wider goal--to contain communism in Southeast Asia.

What additional actions could be taken which might be more effective and might help to speed the achievement of our objectives in Vietnam? One step would be to remove the limitation on targets for air attack in the north, so that industrial facilities, utility plants, and even cities, villages and hamlets would be vulnerable. This does not mean that the North Vietnamese people should be killed indiscriminately by raids on hamlets, villages and cities. But, the people and government of North Vietnam could be told in no uncertain

terms that for every hamlet or village destroyed in South Vietnam, a village or hamlet will be destroyed in North Vietnam, but with prior notice so that the people can be evacuated to refugee centers. They also should be told that henceforth they too will share the burdens and ravages of war which have been borne almost solely by the people in the south, until such time as their government ceases its aggression. This would include destruction of crops and other food supplies as well as water sources. Another step would be to insist that the government of South Vietnam hold free elections, supervised by neutral observers, in every village, hamlet and city now considered to be firmly under government control, and agree to abide by the outcome of such elections. Still another would be to insist upon vigorous prosecution of the recently announced campaign to eliminate corruption. As a final step we could stop telling Red China and the rest of the world that we will continue to exercise restraint in the use of our power against North Vietnam because we do not want to risk Red China's intervention and war with Red China. The traditional Vietnamese hatred of the Chinese would seem to rule out the possibility that North Vietnam would invite Red China to intervene. Red China might intervene on her own if she thought we would invade North Vietnam as we did in Korea and thus might end up at her border. But it is doubtful she will intervene otherwise.

x Therefore, we should make it crystal clear that we will not invade or occupy North Vietnam but will devastate that country, if necessary, to stop its aggression in South Vietnam.

SUMMARY

The United States objectives in Vietnam have been stated many times in many different ways by President Johnson and other Administration spokesmen. For this reason, it has been difficult at times for the American people and others, including our adversaries, to understand exactly what our specific aims are in Vietnam. Moreover, our goals in Vietnam cannot be viewed in isolation of our wider purposes in the world and Southeast Asia as a whole.

There can be little question that our ultimate goal in Vietnam is for that country to be independent in the sense expressed in our world-wide goal--a world of independent nations each free to develop in its own way, at its own pace, with political institutions of its own choice. A world in which all nations live in harmony, under the rule of law, and cooperate to promote their mutual interests and to fulfill the hopes and aspirations of their citizens for a better life. Clearly, we seek the same objective for Southeast Asia as a whole. But, in order to work toward this goal, it is necessary first to establish stability by maintaining the balance of power that exists in the world today. To achieve this end, we have entered into a series of multilateral and bilateral collective defense arrangements.

Today the balance of power in Southeast Asia has been threatened by North Vietnam's attempt to conquer South Vietnam thereby extending Communist rule to the entire country. We have responded to this threat because we felt honor bound to do so by virtue of direct

pledge to South Vietnam as well as an obligation under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty. But, more importantly, we believe that other nations in the area will fall to Communist aggression unless it is stopped in South Vietnam.

Our immediate objectives in Vietnam then are centered around honoring our commitment, stopping Communist aggression and bringing stability to the area. These are realistic and attainable goals and the actions now being taken to achieve them appear to be leading to their successful accomplishment. However, the time required to achieve them continues to be the unknown quantity. President Johnson, Secretary Rusk and others have bent over backwards to assure North Vietnam and the rest of the world that we will continue to exercise restraint in our conduct of the war against North Vietnam. Thus, the brunt of the war is being felt mainly in South Vietnam as it has for more than a decade. It would appear, therefore, that as long as we continue to limit our air attacks on North Vietnam to strictly military targets, thereby restricting the bulk of the destruction to South Vietnam, that it probably will take a long time for North Vietnam to decide that the price of aggression is too high.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of my research on Vietnam I have reached a number of conclusions. Most have been indicated in the body of this paper. Some are at variance with the views expressed by the President and other Administration officials. However, it was not the purpose of this paper to seek information or facts to support any particular viewpoint. Its primary purpose was to examine our objectives in Vietnam and in the process to acquire some knowledge of that country--its problems, people, characteristics, and history--as well as a better understanding of how we became involved, and the origin and nature of our commitment. I believe that this broader purpose has been achieved.

The significant conclusions which I have drawn from my research are:

1. The present United States military involvement in Vietnam grew out of its fundamental policy to contain communism. In furtherance of this policy, we established a series of alliances around the world for the purpose of halting Communist expansion or aggression by use of force. We envisaged an overt armed attack by Communist forces across an international boundary which would be met by united action as in Korea. We did not anticipate military intervention against Communist-led or inspired revolutionary movements, even though externally supported, unless external Communist military forces also intervened overtly. We apparently did not know

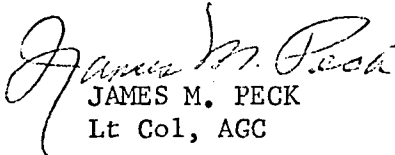
how to cope with covert military intervention, that is, by infiltration as in Vietnam. Thus, we might have become involved militarily much sooner if our Free-World partners had been willing to join us in a united effort as they did in Korea, if we had not been confronted with crises in other parts of the world, and if Administration officials had been able to convey to the American people and our allies the concept that armed aggression by infiltration was tantamount to armed attack across an international boundary.

2. The United States commitment to South Vietnam made by President Eisenhower in 1954 did not envisage the participation of US forces in a combat role in Vietnam. Nor did the commitment made by President Kennedy in 1961. President Kennedy did, however, enlarge the commitment to the extent of increasing the number of US military advisers and by providing helicopter and air transport lift. Thus, our present commitment of US forces in a combat role was the decision of President Johnson. Although he has gone to great lengths to convince the American people that in committing US forces he was merely keeping the pledges of Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, the decision to widen our commitment was his alone. It is not a decision that he should regret. His only regret should be that he did not make it sooner, because anyone who re-reads some of his speeches made during the presidential campaign in 1964, might logically conclude that he was more concerned with being elected President than making what might have been an unpopular decision. Moreover, had he made such a decision after the two Gulf of Tonkin incidents, the possibility exists that the war might not have escalated to its present

state. These incidents were the first and, so far as I have been able to determine, the only direct attacks by regular North Vietnamese forces on United States forces. At the time we replied with a single retaliatory air raid and President Johnson made it clear that we would respond to any further armed attacks. But, he also made it clear in subsequent statements that he did not intend "to supply American boys to do the job that Asian boys should do" or to enlarge the war by bombing North Vietnam "which would result in our committing a good many American boys to fighting a war that ought to be fought by the boys of Asia to help protect their own land." Thus, North Vietnam might well have decided they could escalate the war in South Vietnam without fear of US military intervention so long as they did not directly attack US forces. Conversely, prompt US military intervention might well have prevented the escalation which has occurred.

3. Our objectives in Vietnam have been stated many times but in so many different ways that it is difficult to determine exactly what they are. Moreover, they cannot be found neatly packaged in any single document and must be derived from statements saying what we seek as well as those pointing out what we do not seek. Our objectives as I have derived them are, in my view, realistic and attainable, and the actions now being taken to achieve them appear to be leading to their successful accomplishment. However, in my opinion, their attainment will require a long and costly effort because of our self-imposed constraints on the use of military power. On the one hand we recognize that North Vietnam is the aggressor

and the cause of most of the trouble in South Vietnam, and that achievement of our other objectives is contingent upon persuading North Vietnam to stop its aggression. On the other hand, we are using our military power with restraint in North Vietnam for fear of becoming involved in a war with Red China while, at the same time, we are literally killing with kindness our friends in the south by driving the Viet Cong from their villages time and time again until there is no longer a village for the Viet Cong to hide in or control. Thus, the one inescapable conclusion that emerges is that it will take a long time to persuade North Vietnam to stop its aggression in the south, unless we are willing to make them pay a much steeper price than they are now paying, and only when the price to be paid exceeds the benefits to be gained will that aggression cease.


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